

REMARKS

In response to the election/restriction requirement, applicant confirms the election of the invention of Group I, Claims 1-28. Further, applicant confirms the election of the species directed to a hydrophilic melt additive of hydroxy phenols and polyethylene glycol.

The allowance of Claim 18 and the indication of allowability of Claim 12 are acknowledged with appreciation. To place Claim 12 in condition for immediate allowance, it has been rewritten into independent form incorporating the substance of the claims from which it depends.

The remaining independent claims have been amended to further differentiate applicant's invention from the products described in the cited prior art. In addition, two new independent claims (Claims 31 and 32) are presented directed specifically to a carded web and a spunbonded web respectively. These new claims are supported by the original specification and claims. Note Claim 7 for example.

The present invention is directed to nonwoven polyolefin webs that have durable hydrophilic properties. Polyolefin fibers are inherently hydrophobic, and consequently nonwoven webs produced from polyolefin fibers are hydrophobic in nature. The present invention provides a way to permanently alter the normally hydrophobic properties of the fibers to impart hydrophilic properties to an otherwise hydrophobic polyolefin nonwoven web.

Claims 1-5, 7-11, 14-15, 17 and 26-28 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Hansen et al. Hansen is concerned with an entirely different kind of product from that claimed by applicant and utilizes a different process in producing this product. As noted by the Examiner, Hansen teaches bicomponent fibers that have an outer sheath comprising polyolefin that is made hydrophilic by the addition of a surface active agent. The fibers also have an inner core comprising a polyolefin. However, Hansen is concerned specifically with forming an article composed largely of fluff pulp. The bicomponent fibers are blended with fluff pulp and this mixture is wet-laid to form a

sheet. The sheet is dried and is then fiberized, such as with a hammer mill, and dry-formed into a pad. This pad is subsequently heated to thermobond the fluff pulp and the bicomponent fibers. As seen from Table 2, the pads use a relatively low percentage of synthetic bicomponent fibers mixed with the fluff pulp. Thus, the pads produced by Hansen are characterized as fluff pulp pads. They are certainly not a "polyolefin web" as claimed by applicant.

The amended claims now more clearly differentiate between applicant's polyolefin nonwoven web and the fluff pulp pad of Hansen. Claims 1, 9, 20 and 23 for example call for a polyolefin nonwoven web formed of polyolefin fibers. New independent Claim 31 is directed to a carded thermal bonded polyolefin nonwoven web which consists essentially of carded staple fibers and a multiplicity of bond sites bonding the fibers to form a coherent web. New Claim 32 specifies a spunbonded nonwoven web consisting essentially of continuous polyolefin filaments. Hansen does not teach or suggest making carded thermal bond webs or spunbond webs.

For the reasons noted, it is submitted that the claims as now presented clearly distinguish over the Hansen et al. patent. Accordingly, reconsideration by the Examiner and withdrawal of the rejection based upon the Hansen reference is solicited.

A number of the claims have also been rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103 as being unpatentable over Yeo et al. Patent 5,643,662 in view of Hansen. The Yeo patent discloses a nonwoven fabric that includes a sheath core fiber where one of the components (the sheath) is hydrophilic. However, Yeo achieves the hydrophilic properties by an approach quite different from that employed by applicant. Yeo uses using an inherently hydrophilic polymer, a block copolymer of nylon 6 and polyethylene oxide diamine.

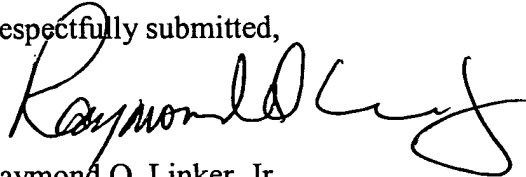
Contrary to what is stated in the Official Action, it would not be obvious to modify the Yeo nonwoven to provide a different hydrophilic component, since Yeo is specifically concerned with using an inherently hydrophilic polymer, which is an entirely different approach from using an inherently hydrophobic polyolefin polymer with a hydrophilic melt additive.

The change that the Examiner proposes be made in the Yeo et al. fiber goes well beyond a mere modification or optimization; it changes the fundamental approach used by Yeo et al. Without some clear incentive or motivation from the prior art, persons of ordinary skill in the art would never contemplate making such a radical change. Neither Yeo et al. nor Hansen provide this incentive or motivation. The person of skill in the art would have no reasonable assurance of success if such a change were to be made. Indeed, in the "real world" a change in polymers of this magnitude would require major testing and trials to confirm that the process and product would be commercially acceptable. Nothing in either Yeo et al. nor in Hansen teach the equivalency of Yeo's inherently hydrophilic nylon block copolymer and Hansen's inherently hydrophobic polyolefin containing a hydrophilic additive. In the absence of some credible evidence that these two very different materials are equivalent or interchangeable in the melt-spinning process, the Examiner has failed to establish a prima facie case of obviousness. Consequently, the rejection must be withdrawn.

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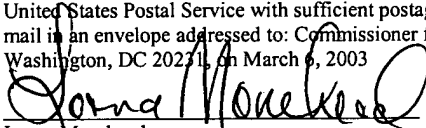
For the reasons noted, it is submitted that the claims as now presented are in condition for immediate allowance. Favorable reconsideration by the Examiner and formal notification of the allowability of all claims as now presented are solicited.

Respectfully submitted,



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